



South Atlantic Fishery Bulletin

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FB17-001

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CONTACT: Frank Helies, 727-209-5988, frank.helies@noaa.gov

Request for Comments: Proposed Actions to Implement Special Management Zones in Federal Waters of the South Atlantic Region

KEY MESSAGE:

NOAA Fisheries requests your comments on an amendment that considers implementation of spawning special management zones (SMZ) in federal waters of the South Atlantic region. The actions outlined in Amendment 36 to the Snapper-Grouper Fishery Management Plan of the South Atlantic region (Amendment 36) are intended to protect spawning, or reproducing, fish and their habitat. **Comments are due by March 6, 2017.**

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED ACTIONS:

- Implement five spawning SMZs in federal waters of the South Atlantic region off North Carolina, South Carolina, and Florida.
- Inside of the spawning SMZs, fishing for, retention, and possession of fish species in the snapper-grouper complex would be prohibited year-round by all fishers.
- Anchoring inside most of the spawning SMZs would not be allowed; however, transit with snapper-grouper species onboard would be allowed if gear is properly stowed in most spawning SMZs.
- Most spawning SMZs would automatically go away in 10 years unless they are reauthorized.
- Move the existing Charleston Deep Artificial Reef Marine Protected Area to match the boundaries of the permitted site.
- Modify the SMZ procedure in the fishery management plan to allow for the designation of spawning SMZs and the framework procedure to allow spawning SMZs to be established or modified through the framework process, rather than through plan amendments.

HOW TO COMMENT ON THE PROPOSED ACTIONS:

The comment period on the amendment is open now through March 6, 2017. You may submit comments by electronic submission or by postal mail. Comments sent by any other method (such as e-mail), to any other address or individual, or received after the end of the comment period, may not be considered by NOAA Fisheries.

The comment period on the amendment will be followed by a comment period on the proposed rule. Comments on the proposed rule will be accepted through the same method as used for the amendment as specified below.

FORMAL FEDERAL REGISTER NAME/NUMBER: 2016-31896, published Jan. 4, 2017

Electronic Submissions: Submit all electronic public comments via the Federal e-Rulemaking Portal.

1. Go to www.regulations.gov/#!docketDetail;D=NOAA-NMFS-2016-0153.
2. Click the "Comment Now!" icon, complete the required fields.
3. Enter or attach your comments.

Mail: Submit written comments to Frank Helies, Southeast Regional Office, NMFS, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

What are the proposed actions in Amendment 36?

- Establish five spawning special management zones (SMZ) off North Carolina, South Carolina, and Florida.
- Inside of the spawning SMZs, fishing for, retention, and possession of fish species in the snapper-grouper complex would be prohibited year-round by all fishers.
- Anchoring inside most of the spawning SMZs would not be allowed; however, transit with snapper-grouper species onboard would be allowed if gear is properly stowed in most spawning SMZs.
- Move the existing Charleston Deep Artificial Reef Marine Protected Area to match the boundaries of the permitted site.
- Modify the SMZ procedure in the fishery management plan to allow for the designation of spawning SMZs.
- Modify the framework procedure to allow spawning SMZs to be established or modified through the framework process, rather than through plan amendments.

Why are the proposed management actions being considered?

- The goal of the spawning SMZs would be to protect spawning, or reproducing, fish and their habitat in certain areas.
- Certain areas are important to snapper-grouper spawning activity mainly due to their habitat/bottom types.
- Protecting these areas, and the associated habitat, may allow the snapper-grouper species to produce more eggs and larvae and may increase the subsequent recruitment of juvenile fish.
- Modifications to the SMZ and framework procedures would provide the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) flexibility when considering SMZs as a management tool by creating a more streamlined process for implementation.

How were proposed spawning SMZ sites selected?

- Spawning areas were selected for consideration based on suggestions by the Council's Marine Protected Area Expert Working Group and through extensive public input from fishermen and other regional experts.
- The working group reviewed scientific data on spawning sites, habitat mapping, and species occurrence and provided recommendations on potential areas for protection. The group met twice and provided a report that is available from the Council's website (See: <http://www.safmc.net/managed-areas/marine-protected-areas>). The Council used the data compiled by the group and input during public hearings when determining spawning SMZ areas to evaluate.

What are the coordinates of the proposed spawning SMZs?

- North Carolina

South Cape Lookout (Corner Coordinates)	West Longitude	North Latitude
	76° 28.617'	33° 53.040'
(5.10 sq mile)	76° 27.798'	33° 52.019'
	76° 30.627'	33° 49.946'
	76° 31.424'	33° 51.041'

- South Carolina

Devil's Hole / Georgetown Hole	West Longitude	North Latitude
	78° 33.220'	32° 34.311'
(3.03 sq mile)	78° 34.996'	32° 34.311'
	78° 34.996'	32° 32.748'
	78° 33.220'	32° 32.748'
Area 51	79° 28.600'	32° 35.250'
	79° 27.000'	32° 35.250'
(2.99 sq mile)	79° 27.000'	32° 33.750'
	79° 28.600'	32° 33.750'
Area 53	79° 22.250'	32° 22.650'
	79° 20.500'	32° 22.650'
(2.99 sq mile)	79° 20.500'	32° 21.150'
	79° 22.250'	32° 21.150'

- Florida

Warsaw Hole	West Longitude	North Latitude
	82° 20.417'	24° 22.277'
(3.60 sq mile)	82° 18.215'	24° 22.277'
	82° 18.215'	24° 20.932'
	82° 20.417'	24° 20.932'

What are the fishing regulations associated with the proposed spawning SMZs?

- All fishing for and harvest of snapper-grouper species in the proposed spawning SMZs would be prohibited. Trolling for pelagic species, such as dolphin, wahoo, tuna, and coastal migratory pelagic species would be permitted.
- In the proposed spawning SMZs, transit with snapper-grouper species aboard a vessel when fishing gear is appropriately stowed would be permitted.
- Anchoring by fishing vessels in the proposed spawning SMZs would be prohibited, except in Area 51 and Area 53.

If implemented, how long would the spawning SMZs be in effect?

- The spawning SMZs would sunset/expire 10 years after implementation if not reauthorized, except Area 51 and Area 53.

How would the spawning SMZs be monitored and evaluated in the future?

- The spawning SMZs may be monitored by methods such as citizen science and fishery independent surveys.
- Citizen science is scientific research conducted, in whole or in part, by amateur or nonprofessional scientists and fishery-independent data comes from non-fishermen such as scientists.
- Monitoring efforts will help evaluate the effectiveness of the spawning SMZs. Information collected may include spawning activity and changes to fish abundance.
- Monitoring details would be specified in a document called a System Management Plan.

Why are the boundaries of the Charleston Deep Artificial Reef Marine Protected Area being moved?

- The Charleston Deep Artificial Reef Marine Protected Area was created in 2009.
- The goal was to prohibit snapper-grouper fishing in an area over sandy bottom and to place artificial reef material in the area.
- The Corps of Engineers, working with the State of South Carolina, modified the boundary of the permitted site to include some material that was recently sunk in the area. The State of South Carolina requested the Council shift the boundary of the marine protected area 1.4 miles to the northwest to match the revised boundary of the permitted site.

Charleston Deep Artificial Reef	West Longitude	North Latitude
NW	79° 9.2'	32° 9.65'
NE	79° 5.595'	32° 7.155'
SW	79° 9.975'	32° 2.36'
SE	79° 13.575'	32° 5.04'

Where can I find more information on Amendment 36?

- Contact NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional Office

By Mail: Frank Helies
NOAA Fisheries, Southeast Regional Office
Sustainable Fisheries Division
263 13th Avenue South
St. Petersburg, Florida 33701-5505

By FAX: (727) 824-5308
By Phone: (727) 824-5305

- Amendment 36 may be found online at the NOAA Fisheries Southeast Regional Office
Website: http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/s_atl/sg/2016/am36/index.html

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- Immediate fishery openings and closures
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- **South Atlantic Recreational Fisheries Related Alerts**
 - Text SATLRECFISH to 888777
- **South Atlantic Commercial Fisheries Related Alerts**
 - Text SATLCOMMFISH to 888777
- **Caribbean Fisheries Related Alerts**
 - Text CARIBFISH to 888777

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